

Readers' Group Discussion Guide: **TORC OF MOONLIGHT** by Linda Acaster

Fiction, published by New Generation Publishing 2009, ISBN: 978-1-90655-875-8
Available in pbk and ebook formats. Visit www.lindaacaster.co.uk for extract and information.

Torc of Moonlight explores the controlling influences of current and past relationships: person to person, person to place, the past to the present.

Nick Blaketon came to the University of Hull to play rugby, drink beer and get laid. Now into his second year, none of it is going right for him. Alice Linwood escaped a claustrophobic home-life full of unresolved trauma, only to bury herself in restrictive research so as to uncover the shrine of a forgotten Celtic water goddess. To Celtic Briton Ognirius Licinius Vranaun, who betrayed his name, his ancestry and his people's religion for the trappings of a Roman lifestyle at Derwentio (Malton), the goddess of the pool is not forgotten, nor forgiven. Is this why universities surround the North York Moors as once did mediaeval seats of learning? Why does tutor Leonard Harkin continue to search for his soul mate, despite his reputation among female students and warnings to leave from his estranged partner?

Author's Note:

The places in *Torc of Moonlight* are real and are described as true as fiction allows. The county of Yorkshire, once home to the Celtic Parisi and Gabrovantices, has more ancient springs known enigmatically as *Lady Well* than anywhere in England.

Points for Discussion:

- Did reading the novel prompt you to learn more about the history of the places depicted? Do you consider that they were merely scene-setting, or did they become an important part of the character set? Did their handling make you view your own area differently?
- Symbolism figures large in the unfolding story, especially triples and triangles. Discuss those you can recall. Did you recognise these as they appeared in the text, or did they only fall into place in later chapters? Do you consider symbolism adds depth to the reading experience, and/or illuminates a larger picture than the novel conveys?
- If you were nineteen, as are the main characters, would you have foreseen the consequences of what was happening? What would you have done differently, if anything, as events began to unfold? Why?
- Do you consider yourself "sensitive"? Has someone you know come to mind and then that person contacted you? Are you superstitious? List well known superstitions and discuss if any have a bearing on your life, or have/had a bearing on your parents' lives? Is the concept of people being able to communicate on a more spiritual level intriguing, or unnerving? Do other societies in the world think the same?
- Ognirius Licinius Vranaun is not depicted as a ghost in the accepted sense, but as an entity caught between planes. What of the unnamed, and virtually unseen, goddess? Did the two have a symbiotic relationship: the belief of each in the other keeping them both "alive" until the power of the active present could be drawn upon? What happens to the deities of religions which lose mass support? Could it happen to the major religions of the present?
- Which everyday sayings or actions, such as 'touching wood', do we use without thought to their origins? Have you tossed something of value into water recently, a coin into a fountain, perhaps, while making a wish? Do you consider you were enacting the same rite as Ognirius Licinius Vranaun? Was it for a similar reason?